

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark shirt, is focused on pouring beer from a tap into a glass. The background shows a bar setting with shelves of snacks. Overlaid on the right side of the image are several large, colorful circles in shades of orange, green, blue, and purple. A white circular callout on the left contains the text 'See the ability, unlock the potential'.

**See the
ability,
unlock the
potential**

The Gold at a Glance Report

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www.inclusiveemployment.com.au

*Champions
for
Change*



CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO



*Above: Jordana, Axis Employment
and the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank*

*Front cover: Kyle, CVGT and the
Belmont Hotel, Bendigo*

Introduction

For most people, having a job is part of life. Going to work expands our social circle, introduces us to new concepts and ideas, and having an income means we can access accommodation, feed ourselves and our families, travel, make plans and build our networks.

However, People with disabilities (PWD) are twice as likely to be unemployed, compared to those without a disability.

There can be significant barriers to PWD becoming employed including inaccessible workplaces, lack of understanding and unconscious biases can stand in the way of being recruited.

PWD are far less likely than their non-disabled peers to have opportunities to access school-based work experience, undertake casual work while at school and are less likely to enrol in tertiary education and gain relevant qualifications.

This places PWD at a significant disadvantage when trying to enter the workforce. For those unable to access employment their social and economic participation in the community is significantly limited.

Local Government can be part of the solution and work towards a more inclusive society by providing opportunities for PWD to gain employment and participate fully in their communities.

This report identifies how three LGAs in regional Victoria have improved employment and inclusion outcomes in their communities and presents the project outcomes that can be transferred to other LGAs and the wider business community.

Project background

The *Champions for Change* project (*Champions*) is an inclusive employment program undertaken as a partnership between three Local Government Areas (LGA) the City of Greater Bendigo, Loddon Shire and Mount Alexander Shire.

Champions was funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) – Economic participation of people with disability (PWD) grant round 2019-2020.

Champions built on the *Inclusive Towns Project* undertaken in 2018/2019. The *Inclusive Towns Project* demonstrated that local businesses had very little knowledge about employing people with a disability. However, many businesses were interested to learn more and were excited about becoming more inclusive and employing workers with disabilities in the future.

Champions was designed to directly employ PWD in the three LGA's to become advocates for change within their community. Their role was to provide educational resources and assistance to local businesses about the benefits of employing PWD.

Due to COVID-19 and the restrictions placed on community, *Champions* adapted to have an internal focus within Local Governments.

This resulted in strong inclusive employment outcomes for PWD including:

- Increased employment for PWD across the three LGA's. Seven year-long traineeships were fully funded that offered targeted entry-level pathways into Local Government and a recognised qualification
- Increased awareness and understanding of Local Government staff to employ PWD
- Identification of actions for increased inclusive employment in each LGA
- A comprehensive range of resources and information developed to support local businesses and organisations to become inclusive employers

Project successes and outcomes

The Project Team

Demonstrating adaptability and resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team had an excellent understanding and personal experience of disability and the barriers to inclusion.

This informed the direction of the project resources, increased the understanding of inclusive employment within LGAs and the local business community and supported the implementation of traineeships across each of the participating LGAs.

Traineeships

The development of the traineeship program has increased the awareness of PWD and inclusive employment for managers, coordinators and staff across multiple LGAs and internal units. The Trainees work as part of the LGA staff team whilst completing a nationally recognised vocational education qualification.

The successful implementation of trainees was achieved through collaboration with the People

and Culture Unit at the City of Greater Bendigo and local disability support service provider CVGT who managed end-to-end employment services on behalf of the LGA's.

Inclusive Employment Guide for businesses

A practical guide for employers with links, resources and case studies highlighting the benefits of employing PWD.

www.inclusivetowns.com.au/inclusive-employment-guide

Podcasts

A three-part podcast series on Inclusive Employment was produced by Eliza Hull, author, presenter and person with a disability - a powerful resource for local employers.

www.inclusivetowns.com.au/inclusive-employment-podcast

Website

Hosting the resources produced by the Champions project, the website will live on beyond the project and provide future inclusion projects with a solid foundation for their work providing a wealth of resources for employers to use when considering employing PWD in their businesses including:

- Inclusive employment practices, tip sheets for employers and case studies that showcase why hiring PWD is good for businesses
- Identification of government subsidies for inclusive employers and how to access them
- Tip sheets and information for jobseekers with a disability
- Latest news and resources pages providing current activities and initiatives in the Inclusive Employment space
- A directory of registered inclusive businesses, with a searchable database of more than 170 regional inclusive businesses - a dynamic resource continuously accessible for new business to register

www.inclusiveemployment.com.au

Inclusive Employment Webinar

Champions partnered with local disability employment service providers (DES), the Australian Network on Disability and Be.Bendigo to produce an inclusive employment webinar for employers interested to learn about how they could employ PWD.

High levels of engagement with the inclusive employment webinar shows local community and businesses are interested in increasing their knowledge about inclusive employment. Participants described the webinar as 'informative, engaging and a valuable piece of work for those new to the disability employment space'. Respondents to the webinar evaluation reported this key message: Personal stories of employment are a powerful vehicle for communicating the personal capabilities and organisational benefits of employing People with Disabilities.

www.inclusivetowns.com.au/webinar-inclusive-employment



The all staff survey

Staff across the three LGA's were asked to consider inclusive employment and offer suggestions on how to improve inclusive employment outcomes. One in 17 staff at The City of Greater Bendigo indicated that they had a disability, significantly below the national average of one in five. This recognises the need for further inclusion initiatives in Local Government.

The top three ways to improve inclusive employment outcomes in Local Government were identified as:

- Providing disability awareness training for all staff
- Providing mentors for new employees with disability
- Showcasing positive stories of success

The change in attitudes and increased understanding

There was an observable increase in staff understanding of disability and how inclusive employment can be implemented. An increased enthusiasm to adopt inclusive practices resulted in seven trainees placed in diverse departments across the three LGAs.

Opportunities moving forwards

- 1 Widespread acceptance of digital media as a primary means of communication throughout COVID-19 means future inclusion initiatives can maximize webinars and forums as a method of community messaging and consultation
- 2 A key finding of the staff survey was increasing inclusion awareness training for all staff. The City of Greater Bendigo is now investing in Scope Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre e-learning modules to allow all staff to undertake further disability awareness training
- 3 The staff survey recommended the use of mentors for new employees with disability and showcasing positive stories of success of employees with disability
- 4 The staff survey data suggests that the employment ratio of PWD to non-disabled people within the City is lower than the national level, supporting a need for greater effort to recruit more PWD going forward
- 5 The original workplan included the employment of PWD to conduct face-to-face interviews with local employers. This remains a viable project to implement in a post pandemic environment, particularly in small to medium sized towns with limited Disability Employment Service connections
- 6 Extensive government funding is available to increase employment outcomes for any new employer who re-engages an eligible apprentice or trainee that was displaced during COVID-19 and further funding that supports employment outcomes is expected. For up-to-date funding and eligibility visit www.employment.gov.au



Barry, Axis
Employment
and the
Bendigo Stadium

Scalable project elements

The work of *Champions for Change* has created a foundation on which future inclusive employment opportunities can grow within LGA's and the broader business sectors. The following three outcomes can be delivered in most organisational settings.

1. Provision of Traineeships

Targeted entry-level pathways provide equitable employment outcomes and are transferable to a wide range of organisational settings.

The key elements of this approach are:

- Unified governance arrangements through a project steering group – a collaborative approach ensuring effective consultation, communication and timely decision-making
- Project leadership through a dedicated project manager
- Provision of wrap around support for trainees supported by a dedicated Trainee, Apprenticeship and Work Placements Officer
- Engagement with a local disability employment service provider registered to provide end-to-end employment services for trainees with disability
- Effective liaison and relationship building with internal managers as potential supervisors of PWD employees



Katrina, WDEA Works and Beechworth Bakery

2. Project Resources

The project produced durable information resources that are available for use by public and private sector organisations across the country and include:

- **Project website**
 - Accessibility - publicly available for businesses to register on and does not require grant funding or a project team to maintain its presence
 - Content - mainstream messages about inclusivity supported by other audio/visual digital media
 - Contextualisation - information is provided which is relevant to public and private sector businesses of different sizes
- **Inclusive Employment webinar**
 - Accessibility - publicly available to watch and share
 - Adaptability - modular design provides capacity for editing to revise content
- **Inclusive employment guide**
 - Accessibility - publicly available to utilise and share
 - Adaptability - digital format allows for customising content to different localities

3. Employee directed future planning

Actively engaging staff about the organisations levels of inclusive employment gave a clear picture of how successfully each LGA is at being inclusive.

This was achieved via an online survey that took approximately six minutes to complete and resulted in a list of suggestions that could be translated into achievable staff-driven organisational actions.

The survey also gave a comparison point to the national average of people with a disability. Results can then be used to support further action in the inclusive employment space and work towards ensuring the local community is represented within the local government workforce.

Checklist

Organisations may find the following tasks useful in the planning, preparation and delivery of inclusive employment projects.

Explore Funding opportunities

Champions for Change was federally funded through ILC. In a post-COVID environment it is expected that there will be multiple funding opportunities that could be tailored to developing or expanding a traineeships program.

You can request a copy of the 'Champions for Change Evaluation report' to support your funding application by contacting communitypartnerships@bendigo.vic.gov.au

Identify costs

Include funding for project management, development of project resources and wages for employees with a disability. In-kind resources provided by the City of Greater Bendigo to *Champions* included assistance of the Trainee Apprenticeship and Work Placements Office, which enabled the provision of wrap around support for new trainees. Other costs that should be considered are the onboarding costs associated with any new staff member such as provision of a laptop, mobile, internet connection, training and professional development.

Identify and engage potential partner organisations early

This may include Disability Employment services, business networks and include a regional approach across organisations working towards the same inclusion goals and outcomes.

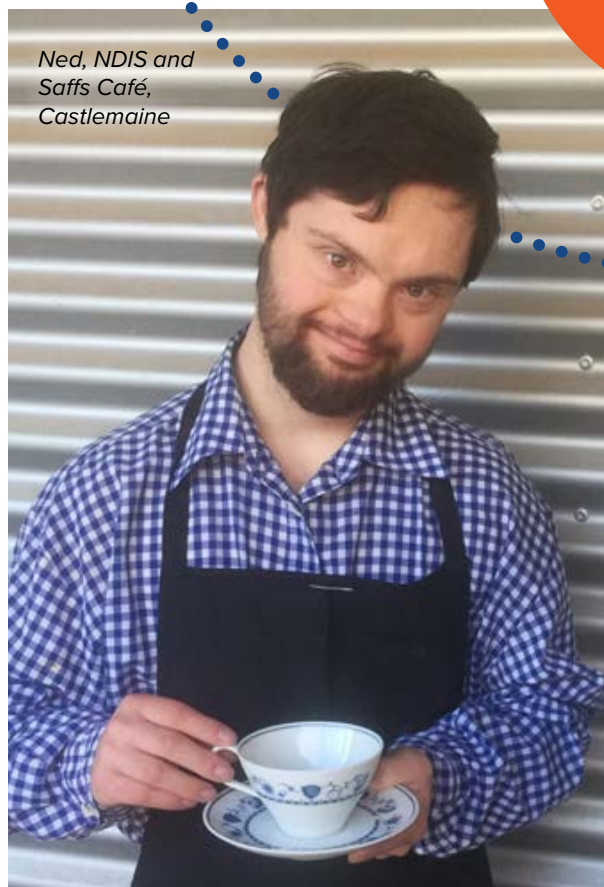
Timeframes

Ensure the start and end date in any grant application provides enough time for recruitment, development and evaluation as well as direct project delivery.

Collaborative project governance arrangements

Establish collaborative project governance arrangements and ensure all partner organisations provide representatives at a middle-management/ Senior executive team level to the Project Steering Group.

Ned, NDIS and
Saffs Café,
Castlemaine



Lived experience

Recruit team members with a lived experience of disability to deliver the project who understand the barriers to inclusion and have a strong desire to be effective change makers.

Project planning

Articulate project expectations and have a robust communications, engagement and evaluation plan to maintain effective communications with stakeholders, and plan for contingencies including changes in senior staff and business priorities.

Review existing resources

Review the existing Project resources available at www.inclusiveemployment.com.au and include them in your communications plan. Consider how to maximise the use of the project resources to maximise the reach of project messaging.



If you have any questions or queries about inclusive employment or would like further information, please visit www.inclusiveemployment.com.au or contact the City of Greater Bendigo on (03) 5434 6000 or communitypartnerships@bendigo.vic.gov.au

If you would like to read this document in an alternative format e.g. large print only, contact Customer Service on (03) 5434 6000 or requests@bendigo.vic.gov.au

